The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

"Without a Preacher"

King penned this outline, which explores the importance of a preacher's spiritual guidance, on the verso of a form for a 19 February 1962 speaking engagement.¹

Introduction: Definition of Preacher and Preaching. See Keighton's [book?]²

1. Without a preacher we would be tempted to be satisfied with our evil ways.³ But the preacher reminds us that in our individual and collective lives that where we are is never where we ought to be. Without a preacher we would be satisfied with the valley, but he reminds us that we are made for the stars

¹. Shirley Bird to Charlotte Sander, 19 February 1962.
². King may refer to Keighton's definition of preaching in his book The Man Who Would Preach ([New York: Abingdon Press, 1956], pp. 19–20). In his copy of the book, which he kept in his personal library, King underlined several passages including: "The sermon is what takes place in the lives of our hearers, and preaching is influencing human lives."
II Without a Preacher we would conclude that we could lift ourselves by our own botstraps

III Without a preacher we would conclude that man is the center of the universe. So many things have happened recently to give us the impression that man can do anything. (Give examples)

AD CSKC

"Levels of Love."
Sermon Delivered at Ebenezer Baptist Church

16 September 1962
Atlanta, Ga

In this sermon, prepared as part of a series on love, King urges his congregation to move beyond varieties of love that involve self-interest, such as romantic love and friendship. He cites a recent conversation with a white man in Albany who claimed the tension of the civil rights movement had caused him to not "love Negroes like I used to." King’s unspoken retort is, “You never did love Negroes because your love was a conditional love. It was conditioned upon the Negro staying in his place, and the minute he stood up as a man and as somebody you didn’t love him anymore.” Instead he recommends a higher kind of love that extends even to segregationists and recommends that his congregation “rise to agape – an all-inclusive love. It is the love of God operating in the human heart.” The following text is taken from an audio recording of the service

I hope that at this moment you will not utter a word unless that word is uttered to God. For the moment you will rise above the miasma and the hurly-burly of everyday life and center your vision on those eternal virtues, those eternal values that should shape our destiny. Life is difficult. It is the road we travel, but in traveling this road we encounter rough places. At points it’s a meandering road, it has its numerous curves, it has its hilly places; and we struggle to get over the hills. Sometimes it’s painful, sometimes it’s trying. But [somehow?] we have a faith, and we have a belief that even though the road of life is meandering and curvy and rough and difficult, we can make it if God guides us and leads us. We go on with that faith, and we can keep on keeping on. We can smile when others all around us are giving up in despair. Lead me. Guide me. Be with me as I journey the road of life.

May we open our hearts and spirits now as we listen to the words from the choir [choir sings].

This morning I would like to continue the series of sermons that I’m preaching.

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1 A voice at the beginning of the tape states the day and date, gives King’s name, and identifies the sermon as "Levels of Love." This was King’s announced sermon topic for 16 September 1962 ("Martin Luther King, Jr. at Ebenezer Sunday," Atlanta Daily World, 15 September 1962)